



PROPOSED
DOMINION MESSENGER PIGEON
ASSOCIATION.



The Commandant of the Royal Military College, Kingston, will be glad to hear from any gentlemen interested in initiating and establishing an organized system of messenger pigeon stations throughout Canada. Officers of the Canadian forces at any of the undermentioned towns are especially appealed to for co-operation :--Windsor, London, Goderich, St. Catharines, Toronto, Peterboro', Ottawa, Montreal, Sherbrook, Quebec, Kamouraska, Rimouski, Colebrook, Fredericton, St. John, Chatham, St. Annes, Gaspé, Pictou, Halifax.



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Interesting Facts about Messenger or Homing Pigeons.

The systematic employment of pigeons as messengers commenced with the current century. They were then employed by sporting and other newspapers, and by the London Stock Exchange.

When, during the Franco-German War (1870-71), Paris was besieged—communication with the outside world was effected by means of balloons and pigeons. 51 balloons were employed for letter service, and 6 for telegraph service. These carried aeronauts, passengers and pigeons out of Paris; pigeons carried despatches into Paris.

Of 64 balloon ascents 57 succeeded; 5 balloons were captured and 2 were lost at sea.

The balloons carried $8\frac{1}{2}$ tons including more than 3,000,000 letters besides aeronauts and 91 passengers.

363 postal pigeons were employed; 57 of these carried return mails into Paris.

In England, open letters not referring to war matters and limited to 20 words—were received for despatch via Tours into Paris. A charge of 10c. per word and 12½ per message to cover postage was made.

Each bird carried messages for the despatch of which about \$56,000 were paid as postage.

The despatches were repeated—occasionally 20 times, and even 30 times—until receipt was acknowledged by balloon post.

At the despatching stations the manuscript messages for Paris were set in ordinary type, and printed on sheets large enough to contain 200 of them.

By micro-photography the printed matter of 16 sheets was transferred to a film or pellicle of collodion—measuring two inches by one inch.

18 pellicles—packed by tight rolling and inserting them in a small quill—weighed about $15\frac{1}{2}$ grains. This was considered a load for a single pigeon, but contained 50,000 despatches!

On receipt in Paris the collodion films were flattened out; and, by means of an electric lantern, the messages on them were at once printed on sensitive paper,—enlarged to readable size.

A few statistics will demonstrate the rapid development of the use of pigeon messengers.

Since the Franco-German War (1870-71), every important fortress on the continent of Europe has been provided with a pigeon loft. In addition, in both France and Germany, numerous lofts have been established at other places than fortresses—and the governments encourage by prizes and special legislation, the maintenance of messenger pigeon-lofts by private individuals.

In France all messenger pigeons are registered by government agents; and the flying of German pigeons from French soil is strictly prohibited.

Scouts—on the Continent of Europe—are now accustomed to carry messenger pigeons.

Belgium at one time took the lead in the rearing and training of messenger pigeons.

On the 16th May, 1874, 30,000 pigeons passed through Brussels on their way to training stages.

On the 24th of the same month 30,000 were sent out; and on the 31st of the month 40,000.

On the 23rd May, 1875, the Province of Liege sent 46,000 pigeons out for training in two special trains each of 23 cars.

In France and Belgium the statistics of pigeon races for 1873 and 1874 are as follows:

		Races.		Pigeons flown.		Value of Prizes.
1873	....	1,140	....	197,000	....	\$115,068.16
1874	....	1,340	....	244,160	....	\$142,394.11

At Chatellerault, on the 26th June, 1875—there arrived 2,000—from 8 towns, to be liberated the next morning.

On the 11th July, 1875, 2,005 birds were started from Blois to fly to Charleroi a distance of 234 miles.

On the 25th June, 1874, 587 birds were thrown to fly from Morceaux to Ghent a distance of 545 miles.

A bird has covered a distance of 1,500 miles in three days—flying only during daylight.

1,445 birds were thrown at Orleans to fly to St. Nicholas—a distance of 243 miles. All completed the journey in times not differing more than 23 minutes. The swiftest occupied 4 hours and 51 minutes; the slowest 5 hours and 14 minutes.

On the 3rd June, 1860, a bird passed over the distance between Blois and Dison at the average rate of 1,772 yards a minute.

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Its Object.

The practical object in view is to supplement the facilities for the rapid transmission of messages, afforded by telegraph lines:—in peace time to act as feeders to those lines; in war time to act as feeders or as substitutes.

In war time the occasions are innumerable when serious derangement of plans, loss and discomfiture may be involved by the absence of previously organized provision for the rapid transmission of news. The advantage in favor of the side possessing such facilities over an opponent without them is enormous.

To disarrange an enemy's means of communicating orders and of transmitting and receiving information is a most certain method to cause him delays, and it may be confusion.

That the destruction of an opponent's telegraph lines should be a first object in—if not a preliminary to attack—and the destruction of one's own lines a preliminary to retreat before the enemy—needs no elucidation. But the lines having been destroyed, a substitute not controllable by the enemy is necessary.

War vessels defending a coast are frequently without the means to transmit vital intelligence to the mainland.

In peace—at places remote from telegraph stations—election returns,—the wants of explorers and of sporting parties—light houses—vessels leaving the coast—camps and military manoeuvres—domestic needs—interrupted electric communication—pigeon flying matches—and numerous other circumstances afford countless useful and amusing occasions for employing messenger pigeons either as feeders to telegraph lines, or as substitutes for these.

That messenger pigeons can easily fly 400 miles a day,—that single birds have frequently been entrusted with the carriage of 50,000 despatches at a time,—and that the birds are themselves easily portable to any place where their services are needed—should suffice to secure very general support for a Dominion Messenger Pigeon Association.

Initiation of Organization.

The self evident method to be followed in developing the use of messenger pigeons throughout Canada—is to encourage the establishment of lofts in places along the railway lines. Such places afford special facilities for training birds, and for the transmission of messages brought in by the pigeons from points off the lines.

Training Birds.

A strong natural disinclination to remain away from its loft, and a marked facility in finding its way homewards—are the characteristics of the messenger pigeon which make it a useful carrier.

A French bird captured at the siege of Paris was sent, as an interesting prisoner of war, by the Germans, to Berlin. The bird managed to get free after a lapse of four years. It flew back to its loft in Paris.

Training pigeons amounts to nothing more than exercising them in satisfying their desire to return to their lofts. By exercise, the desire and the power to satisfy it are together developed.

When there are lines of railway connecting loft stations—training birds is capable of great simplicity, provided the owners of the lofts agree to assist one another.

The owner of one loft sends a number of his birds by rail to the owner of another loft at a distance. On receipt of the birds at the distant stations they are kept and cared for until the time appointed for their despatch homewards, when they are *thrown* for their training flight.

Advantages of Organized Association.

If the owners of the various lofts are banded together with common interests as fellow members of an Association, there result important mutual advantages. Co-operation largely reduces expense—and increases efficiency.

A stock of the best birds can be obtained from which member's lofts can be supplied at a cost little in excess of the expense of breeding.

Were each loft owner to obtain for himself pure stock—the expense would be very much heavier.

By co-operation it may be expected that railway facilities can be secured which would otherwise be unattainable:—similarly with regard to telegraph facilities. The cases and hampers for the conveyance of pigeons might generally be the property of the Association—and used in common by its members, with economy to individuals and convenience to all.

Assume a chain of 26 stations indicated by the letters of the alphabet from Windsor to Halifax:—further assume that each owner of a loft has two of his birds at the station next eastward and two at the station next westward from his own. If it be now desired to send four messages simultaneously

One from A to Z

One from Z to A

One from M to A

One from M to Z

The owner of A loft releases one of B's birds who releases one of C's, and so on until Y's owner despatches Z's bird to him with the message from A.

The owner of Z loft originates the despatch of the message to travel in the reverse order to A. At the same time M may be able to take advantage of the messages moving eastward and westward from A to Z to send the despatches he has for Z and A.

To locate the birds in preparation for the above transmission of messages—the movement of one hamper eastward and of one westward, that is the movement of two hampers in all, would suffice.

On the other hand if the loft owners are not members of an association having common interests—each of them would have had to employ two hampers, and to have had two others in reserve. That is—unassociated the loft owners would require about 104 hampers amongst them to effect the same transmission of messages as two might accomplish and 26 certainly would suffice for, provided the hampers were common property. The case is one of comparison of extremes, but it answers for the purpose of illustration of economy in organized co-operation.

Associated loft owners would probably find the interest of brother members in caring for the birds sent to these, one of the greatest conveniences resulting from association. Being a member would in effect provide a trustworthy and experienced agent at all important points. Without association it would be impossible for individual loft owners to effect connection with distant points. It needs only an association rule that two or more birds are to be kept by each loft owner at the stations eastward and westward from him, to ensure at all times the working of the system. But amongst unassociated loft owners no such rule could obtain—and their usefulness would be simply of a local character, and scarcely capable of development.

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